



## **La Joya**

Independent School District

### **Superintendent's Office**

200 W. Expressway 83, La Joya, Texas 78560

Tel. (956) 323-2002

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### **Board of Trustees**

Armin Garza, President

Claudia Ochoa, Vice-President

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Frances Ana Salinas, Member

Oscar "Coach" Salinas, Member

October 18, 2018

State Legislator

P. O. Box 12428

Austin, Texas 78711-2428

## **RE: La Joya Independent School District Sports and Learning Complex**

Dear State Legislator,

I write to you today on behalf of La Joya Independent School District. As you are aware, there have been recent headlines circulating around our state, drawing attention to the construction of the District's Sports and Learning Complex, specifically, the portion of the project that included an outdoor pool and three slides for use by the District's students. Unfortunately, like most headlines today, those stories only tell half the story. That is why I wanted to take the time today to write to you and invite you to see for yourself the innovative things that La Joya ISD is doing to educate our students and demonstrate what this project is all about.

La Joya ISD serves one of the poorest communities in the State of Texas. Nearly two-thirds of our families live below the poverty line, 93.4% of our students are classified as economically disadvantaged, 53.6% are English learners and a large majority of our high-school students begin working before graduating high-school to help their families make ends meet. Where our students live, some streets are not paved, some do not have street lighting, and some do not even have sewer service. This means that basic services such as libraries, afterschool programs, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA's that supplement a traditional school district education are difficult to come by for our students. This reality forces La Joya ISD to think outside the box to provide our students the same educational experiences and opportunities that other students in the region and state enjoy.

Last year, La Joya ISD was proud to open the doors to the La Joya ISD Sports and Learning Complex. This multi-purpose education facility includes a student resource center/homework center, equipped with computers and tutors, allowing our students access to technology and a safe-learning space afterschool and during the summer. It also includes a planetarium to engage our students in math and science. We were also proud to include a set of tennis courts. Additionally, we built our own natatorium, allowing us to drastically cut on transportation costs and rental fees of outside facilities for swimming practices and meets. Prior to the construction of the Sports and Learning Complex, the District spent funds and students lost instructional time because of the travel time to neighboring districts with the facilities that are now available to La Joya ISD's students. The natatorium, planetarium, resource center, and tennis courts accounted for more than two thirds of the total cost of the project. This portion of the project alone will save the school district over \$75,000 a year in pool rental fees, tens-of-thousands of dollars in gasoline for school buses, payroll for bus drivers, and other costs associated with transporting students to and from neighboring cities to use the rented facilities.

***Dr. Alda T. Benavides, Superintendent of Schools***

***Educational Excellence-The Right of Every Student***





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Now to the issue of the "water park." The water slides and recreational pool accounted for approximately 10% of our investment, but has garnered the most headlines. This portion of the project includes three small water slides, a kiddie wading pool, and a small recreational pool. We incorporated our curriculum for the planetarium and had students launch rockets from our science fields using project-based lessons, and we are teaching our 4<sup>th</sup> grade students how to swim. Below is the cost breakdown of the project:

• Natatorium	\$11,183,000.00
• Planetarium	\$ 1,000,000.00
• Tennis Courts	\$ 500,000.00
• Water slides and outdoor pool	\$ 2,000,000.00

This project is one our community is proud of. The La Joya ISD Sports and Learning Complex is a result of the financial responsibility by District leadership and the vision of the Board of Trustees. The District has saved for years, spent frugally, and was able to pay for this project out of the District's fund balance. Our schools have seen improved academics, and we have proven to be one of the most effective school districts in the state in educating the specific student demographic we serve. There are articles that ask how schools in the Rio Grande Valley are successful in educating its students even though the majority of them are economically disadvantaged and are English language learners. Projects like the La Joya Sports and Learning Complex help a lot by providing opportunities for project-based lessons and state of the art facilities for our students no matter their economic situation. We are proud of our district's overall rating of a "B" and a five-year graduation rate of a 90.5%.

Therefore, we invite you to visit us and witness what this project is about. We invite you to see for yourself what is happening in our schools by the border. If Texas is to lead the future of education, it is time for our schools to be more than brick and mortar behind a gate and be at the forefront of our Texas communities.

Respectfully,

Alda. T. Benavides, Ed. D.

La Joya ISD Superintendent of Schools

Cc: Board of Trustees

*Dr. Alda T. Benavides, Superintendent of Schools*  
*Educational Excellence-The Right of Every Student*